

# ALLIANCE FOR IMMIGRANT SURVIVORS

## AIS Statement on USCIS Announcement of new HART Service Center

March 2023

Yesterday, [USCIS announced the opening of the Humanitarian, Adjustment, Removing Conditions, and Travel Documents \(HART\) Service Center](#), the sixth service center within its Service Center Operations (SCOPS) directorate, and the first to focus on humanitarian and other workload cases.

HART will have a dedicated team of specially trained staff responsible for adjudications, including VAWA self-petitions (I-360), issuing U visa bona fide determinations (I-918), and reunification of refugees and asylees with their family members (I-730).

**The [Alliance for Immigrant Survivors](#) (AIS) welcomes this new development, which holds the promise of better and more timely responses to the immigration petitions of survivors of gender-based violence such as domestic abuse, sexual assault, and human trafficking.** The four co-chairs of the AIS Steering Committee shared their hopes for the positive effect the new HART Service Center could have on the lives of immigrant survivors:

“This is an encouraging step by USCIS. Our hope is that this change will mean that immigrant survivors currently waiting in limbo receive fairer decisions more quickly. Right now, backlogs mean a trafficking or abuse survivor – even one who experienced violence right here in the U.S. and at the hands of a U.S. citizen – can spend years waiting for a decision on their case,” said **Archi Pyati, CEO of the Tahirih Justice Center**. “The longer an applicant waits, the longer she’s at risk of unemployment, poverty, homelessness, and further exploitation or abuse. Breaking the cycle of violence means being on a path to healing and stability, which is often impossible when backlogs continue unabated. The HART Service Center could go a long way to making justice and safety a reality for immigrant survivors of trafficking and gender-based violence.”

“We welcome this news about the establishment of the new HART Service Center. The current cap on the number of U visas granted each year, and the limited resources at USCIS to process applications, has led to a truly untenable situation in which survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and other crimes wait many, many years for the relief they deserve,” said **Kirsten Rambo, Executive Director of ASISTA**. “These egregious wait times only compound existing trauma for survivors and their children. We are hopeful that the new HART Service Center will help alleviate that trauma by focusing much-needed resources on providing relief to survivors more quickly and efficiently. It is our hope that this newly coordinated focus on these humanitarian cases will afford survivors much quicker access to safety, justice, and stability – all of which benefits not only survivors and their families, but also their communities and our society as a whole.”

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“We are looking forward to working with a dedicated team of compassionate adjudicators who are trained to be culturally specific and trauma informed while they promptly process these critical cases,” said **Monica Modi Khant, Executive Director of the Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence**. “It is refreshing when more resources are committed to humanitarian cases where the impact to survivors of gender-based violence is significant and the need is always great.”

“The launch of the new HART Service Center is a critical step forward by USCIS in serving immigrant survivors of gender-based violence. This new agency is positioned to better implement the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) immigration protections for survivors who currently experience egregious delays in processing their U visas. There are over [300,000](#) individuals with pending U visa matters, and the processing times just to place these cases on the waitlist is over five years. These significant delays and the lack of access to financial resources that go with them can subject survivors and their families to additional risks of violence, exploitation, manipulation, and trauma,” said **Patti Tototzintle, President and CEO of Esperanza United** (formerly Casa de Esperanza: National Latin@ Network). “We are hopeful that the new HART Service Center will make processing these petitions faster and thus allow survivors to qualify for work authorization sooner.”

We look forward to working with USCIS to ensure that all adjudicators staffing the new HART Service Center receive expert training on trauma informed and culturally responsive practices. **These officers need to hear from experts at organizations serving survivors directly and ideally from survivor advocates themselves.** AIS is eager to work in partnership with USCIS to achieve the ambitious goals of the HART Service Center.

The [Alliance for Immigrant Survivors](#) (AIS) is a national network of advocates and allies dedicated to defending and advocating for policies that ensure immigrant survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, trafficking, and other gender-based abuses have access to life-saving protections that all survivors of violence deserve.

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